

Remarks at the National Governors Association Dinner

February 21, 2016

The President. Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Well, good evening, everybody.

Audience members. Good evening.

The President. Welcome to the White House. You all look spectacular. *[Laughter]* I am going to be brief. There comes a time in the second term when the President should make his toasts short—*[laughter]*—and this is one of those moments.

Tonight I plan to fulfill my duty and give you an indisputably qualified set of remarks. I trust that you'll give them a fair hearing. *[Laughter]*

I want to start by thanking the Governors and your loved ones who are here tonight. I want to thank your chair, Governor Gary Herbert, and your vice chair, Governor Terry McAuliffe. They're both doing outstanding jobs in their respective States.

I also want to give some special recognition to Iowa Governor Terry Branstad. Now, in December, Terry became the longest serving Governor in our Nation's history, elected to six terms—more than 21 years and counting—which means that Terry is in the rare club of people who have been inside more Iowa coffee shops and high school gyms than me. *[Laughter]* He also has done some dancing with the First Lady on stage, which——

The First Lady. Very good.

The President. It was excellent. I should also mention that tonight is the birthday of our Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell. So let's give Sally a big round of applause, wherever she is. There she is. Happy birthday, Sally.

So this is my final Governors dinner, at least my final one as President. *[Laughter]* I'm just kidding. That's a joke, people. *[Laughter]* I wanted to see how Michelle would react. *[Laughter]* But I always look forward to this weekend because it reminds me of all the great work that's being done in State capitals all across the country.

Recently, I went back to Springfield, Illinois, our home capital, and went back to the chambers where I had served as a State senator. I talked about my experiences as a legislator there. And with all sincerity, I talked about how Democrats and Republicans found a way to fight like heck, oftentimes voted along party lines, but were able to shake hands after a disagreement and, every so often, actually got some work done that benefited the people of the State; how we could assume the best in each other and not the worst and find areas of common ground.

I know that at the moment, some of you might feel a little differently about your legislators—*[laughter]*—depending on where you are in the budget process. *[Laughter]* But the truth is, as frustrating as our politics too often feels, you know the same thing that I do, which is, the people we serve don't typically think in terms of red and blue, left or right. They just want a shot to get ahead. They want to make sure that they've got a good job, that their kids can succeed, that they can save enough for retirement. They want to know that we're doing our jobs and that we are operating with a sense of fairness and that we're looking out for folks without a voice.

And in other words, you see, just as I do, the basic decency and goodness of the American people every single day. That's one of the great benefits of public service. So—*[applause]*. And you know that when you stray from that way of doing business, there is some accountability,

because you're a little closer to the ground and the folks you grew up with—and you may still go to church with—will find you. You're not so far away.

So while people sometimes may wonder why I have been spending some time talking about a better politics, it's not because I'm naive. It's because, in fact, I'm giving voice to the experiences that all of us have: what makes public service so worthwhile even with all the tough stuff and scrutiny that goes with it. It's what we've seen in coffee shops and high school gyms and town hall meetings and backyard picnics. I think you, like I, believe that politics can be a noble endeavor and that a politics that better reflects our people is not only possible, but it couldn't be more important.

LBJ told a group of Governors who'd gathered just 3 days after we lost President Kennedy, "A government by checks and balances will work only when people are willing to cooperate and work together for the common good." I believe that. And I know that so many of you believe that as well.

So tonight I'd like to propose a toast to our Nation's Governors, to their loved ones that put up with them—[laughter]—and to all those willing to cooperate and work together for the common good.

[At this point, the President offered a toast.]

Audience members. Hear, hear.

The President. Hear, hear.

So I hope everybody has a wonderful evening. At this stage, I would like to invite the chairman of the National Governors Association, Governor Herbert, to come up and say a few words.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:18 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Gary R. Herbert of Utah; and Gov. Terrence R. McAuliffe of Virginia.

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